

2015 State of the City Address

Mayor Jim Griffith

September 12, 2015

I want to thank you all for coming out for this year's State of the City event. This is my fifth State of the City as a councilmember, and it's always one of my favorite events.

It's a chance to get together as a community, reconnect with friends and colleagues, and recognize individuals and organizations for their outstanding service to our community.

But most important, it's an opportunity to pause and reflect on what we've accomplished, where we are today, and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead in the years to come.

Last year, as we emerged from the worst recession in history, we celebrated our economic recovery and new-found opportunities to improve the quality of life in Sunnyvale. I made last year's State of the City a demonstration of those opportunities by holding it at our new Seven Seas Park – the first new park constructed by the City in 25 years.

A few weeks prior to that, the Council and our new City Manager Deanna Santana had held strategic planning sessions to identify and prioritize our greatest challenges.

From those sessions came a plan to accelerate Public Safety hiring, which we approved last year. We also pursued new options to make progress on completing the Sunnyvale Downtown. And we initiated the new effort to modernize our Civic Center and Library facilities.

This year, we continue to see Silicon Valley leading the nation in economic growth, and we all know that Sunnyvale leads the Valley.

But the great success that we've enjoyed also brings with it significant challenges, so we've redoubled our efforts to preserve the quality of life that our residents enjoy and expect by expanding and improving our city services and infrastructure.

The one challenge most evident in residents' daily lives is the impact of increased traffic and the strain that the valley's economic development has placed on our infrastructure.

And we're active in both immediate and long-term efforts to make the most of our resources.

Over the past year, we've made huge strides in expanding Sunnyvale's bicycle network by adding miles of new bike lanes, with more to come. We're completing the rehabilitation of the Fair Oaks and Calabazas bridges – the last of our four bridges. And we're currently studying ways to improve transit on Wolfe Road between El Camino and Homestead, one of our most critical north-south arteries.

But our most significant effort to address our traffic issues involves the proposed improvements to the 101/237/Mathilda interchanges, not so affectionately called the Monster Interchange. This major project will reduce congestion on Mathilda Avenue by modifying the on- and off-ramps, improving and relocating intersection signals and turn lanes, and enhancing bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

VTA is currently preparing the EIR for two design alternatives, and they just held a key outreach meeting last month. This is a critical project and we've assigned it top priority, for obvious reasons.

We've also addressed a critical need in that part of the city with the public/private partnership that will bring us a brand new Fire Station 5. This is one of my favorite stories, so I always look for chances to tell folks how this came to be. As part of the approval process for Jay Paul's new Moffett Place campus, our former City Manager, Gary Luebbers, took a hard look at what community benefits were most needed in that part of Sunnyvale.

So Gary told the developer, "You know, with all of those tall buildings being constructed, Sunnyvale really needs a fire ladder truck capable of serving those tall buildings." And the developer went away, came back, and agreed to buy Sunnyvale a new long ladder fire rig.

So then, Gary said, "That's great, but you know, a new rig isn't much good if we don't have a place to store the rig." And the developer went away, came back, and agreed to a land swap, where we would give up the old Fire Station 5 property in exchange for a new, larger Fire Station 5 parcel, including a newly-constructed building.

So then, Gary said, "That's great, but you know, our officers also really need a shooting range, so they don't have to drive outside of Sunnyvale for training." And that's what we will receive in spring of next year – a full-service Fire Station 5, complete with a new long-ladder rig, an indoor shooting range, and additional facilities for meetings and training.

But it doesn't stop there. Chief Grgurina and City Manager Santana have taken it a step further, with the addition of a second Sunnyvale monopole for emergency services at Fire Station 5, recently approved by the City Council. This will make our new Fire Station 5 a key element in Silicon Valley's emergency services regional interoperability initiative.

But most important, Sunnyvale will get expanded public safety services in the part of the city that has experienced the greatest growth in recent years.

Another painful aspect of our economic success is the housing crisis that is inevitable when you live in the best place in the world. Rents are on the rise, and it's harder and harder for people to become homeowners.

There's no easy solution to the housing problem. But we continue to attack it on multiple fronts, looking for ways to strike a better balance in our community.

Nowhere is that more evident than the Lawrence Station Area Plan. This specific plan outlines a long-term vision of smart, transit-oriented growth to support our needs while placing fewer demands on our roads and infrastructure.

We're doing the same with our El Camino Precise Plan, our Peery Park Specific Plan, and the update to our Land Use and Transportation Element, or LUTE.

Each of these planning efforts has at its core the need for community engagement, through outreach meetings, surveys, and committees. In planning for Sunnyvale's future, we're committed to a future that our residents want and will embrace. And each of these will help us plan for a Sunnyvale that will meet our future needs, be they transportation, business development, or addressing the housing crisis.

But we cannot discuss the housing crisis without also addressing the issue of homelessness. Again, this is an area where Sunnyvale has stepped up as a leader.

The only way to solve the problem of homelessness is to provide homes to the homeless. Nowhere is that philosophy better illustrated than the Onizuka Crossing and Parkside Studios affordable housing projects, developed with funding from the City.

These two projects on the site of the old Sunnyvale Armory will provide 115 units of low and very low income housing, with 47 units devoted to the homeless.

Already, the Parkside Studios project is complete and fully occupied, and Onizuka Crossing is scheduled to be completed this spring.

Homelessness is just one symptom of rising income inequality. And income inequality is very apparent to many of our residents, as rental increases and the high cost of living drive them out of Silicon Valley.

Sunnyvale has a moral obligation to protect its families. In the past year, we've created additional housing fees on new developments that will help fund affordable housing projects and reduce the cost of housing for the Sunnyvale's most vulnerable.

We're pursuing a local hiring initiative to strengthen the local labor market and protect local jobs.

And most directly, we've been at the forefront of efforts to raise the minimum wage – first with our own local increase this year; then going even further by partnering with Mountain View towards a regional goal of \$15 an hour by 2018.

While we act locally on all of these important regional topics, we also have a responsibility to think globally. We simply cannot plan for

Sunnyvale's future without understanding the threat posed to us by climate change.

We've made that threat a cornerstone of our thinking through the development of Sunnyvale's Climate Action Plan. Our CAP focuses on reducing our impact on the environment, accommodating the changes that will come, and taking responsibility for Sunnyvale's footprint on the world.

At the very heart of our CAP is our newly-formed Community Choice Energy partnership, called Silicon Valley Clean Energy. Under Sunnyvale's leadership, Mountain View, Cupertino, and Santa Clara County have joined with us in an effort to bring renewable power to our residents at competitive rates.

Los Altos hopes to join us very shortly, and other cities are lining up as well. Not only does SV Clean Energy intend to offer competitive rates, its renewable energy portfolio should dramatically reduce Sunnyvale's greenhouse gas emissions.

If taking on climate change wasn't enough, we are also finally taking action on our aging Civic Center and Library facilities.

Built decades ago, they are no longer capable of meeting our needs, which severely inhibits our ability to provide services. Our Civic Center is so old it was built before the City owned its first computer – and before we had any concept of the City even owning a computer.

As a result, Sunnyvale's IT server farm currently sits in what was originally our jail.

Many of our staff work in offices without adequate plumbing.

Outside experts have advised us that the wisest solution for some of our Civic Center buildings is simply a bulldozer.

And now – despite the fact that our library patrons generate the highest hourly circulation rate of any library system in the state of California – we’re now faced with the embarrassment of library facilities that, by any measure, fall woefully behind the rest of the county.

We simply cannot wait any longer to address this serious problem. We cannot provide residents with the public safety, city planning, and other administrative services that they want and demand with facilities that actively inhibit the ability to deliver those services.

And we have failed to provide Sunnyvale with a library capable of meeting the community’s needs. Every time we speak of the need to provide quality education through effective and successful schools, the next two words out of our mouths should be “and libraries.”

If we don’t commit to providing this essential service, we are failing our children’s education, we are failing their futures, and we are failing our community.

That is unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to you.

This is why we’re committed to the effort to modernize our Civic Center and Library.

Since February, that effort has been in full swing with focus groups, online surveys, newsletters, multiple community workshops, neighborhood meetings, and more.

We've developed a Vision for the new facilities and space that doesn't just serve the community – it encourages community participation while stressing fiscal and environmental sustainability.

We're evaluating space needs and doing a market analysis to better understand site plan alternatives and funding strategies.

By the end of the year, we'll have reviewed those alternatives and funding strategies and begun making the hard decisions.

I want to thank all of you who have gotten involved, and I want to encourage you all to get and stay involved.

This is an opportunity that only comes along every fifty or sixty years.

This is our chance to develop a Civic Center that is a city asset, a community gathering place, and a source of Sunnyvale pride.

But without question, the single greatest concern to our residents is the completion of the Sunnyvale Downtown.

And at long last, we have good news.

Just a few weeks ago, a California Supreme Court action finally ended the litigation that has stalled the Town Center project for years.

This should clear the way for the current owner to sell the property to a developer who can complete the project, and give Sunnyvale the Downtown it has wanted for so long.

In fact, the current owner – Wells Fargo – has already put the property on the market for sale.

Meanwhile, we are positioning the City to respond quickly when the project moves forward.

A long time has passed since the original plans were drawn up and approved, and Sunnyvale – and the Valley for that matter – has changed a lot since then.

Because of that, we've already commissioned a market analysis to evaluate the project's viability in today's marketplace. It isn't enough to just build any old Downtown – we want, and we deserve, a successful Downtown that serves our needs.

To that end, we've also hired independent consultants who can help us confirm the right buyer – one with the qualifications, experience and financing capabilities to get the job done.

Living in Sunnyvale, we are all so incredibly blessed and lucky. We see our good fortune all around us every day – our quality of life, wonderful weather, the economic prosperity of Silicon Valley, or just the beauty surrounding us in places like here in Washington Park.

But with these blessings come serious challenges, be it the high cost of living, income inequality, housing affordability and homelessness, or traffic and transportation.

All of the easy problems have already been solved. These challenges that remain are incredibly hard, with no easy answers, and they're challenges that we have to solve.

But Silicon Valley was built on our ability to solve the world's problems. And we are a community of people who look out for each other.

When we come together with a common purpose and set our path forward, there's nothing we can't accomplish if we work together to make Sunnyvale better.

So this is my challenge to you. Don't sit idly by.

Fill out an online survey. Attend a meeting.

Join a commission. Work with an advocacy group.

Find any way you can to get involved.

And then recruit your friends and neighbors.

We, your elected leaders and dedicated city staff, work very hard to make Sunnyvale a terrific city – but it's up to you to make it into a great community.

I have great pride in what we've accomplished so far, and I have great confidence in what the future will bring. And we're all committed to finding the best possible future for Sunnyvale. I hope you are too.

I hope you'll join us as we continue to chart our course forward to make Sunnyvale the best that it can be.

Thank you for being here today and I look forward to what the next year will bring.